

<b>SCRUTINY COMMISSION FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 4</b>
<b>7 September 2015</b>	<b>Public Report</b>

## **Report of the Community Capacity Manager**

**Contact Officer – Cate Harding**  
**Contact Details – 01733 317497**

### **DEVELOPING A RURAL VISION & PARISH CHARTER FOR PETERBOROUGH**

#### **1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Commission for Rural Communities endorsed the co-production of a Rural Vision and Parish Charter in March 2015 subject to full consultation with Parish Councils. This report presents the outcomes of that work.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The Commission is recommended to approve the Rural Vision and Parish Charter for submission to Cabinet, and to ask Cabinet to subsequently adopt them for implementation across the Council.

#### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 A Rural Working Group was originally set up in 2006, made up of representatives from Peterborough Parish Councils and the National Association of Local Councils. Together, with the support of the Greater Peterborough Partnership, they developed the Rural Vision and Strategy which was then aligned to the council's strategic priorities and measures within the Local Area Agreement 2007/2008.
- 3.2 In response to the Commission's request at their November 2014 meeting a refreshed Rural Vision was co-produced with the Parish Liaison Forum Working Group. The draft document, which incorporated a new Parish Charter, was agreed in principle by the Commission subject to wider consultation with the Parish Councils of Peterborough.
- 3.3 The draft documents presented to the Commission in March 2015 have been edited to reflect comments and responses from the Parish Councils. Many further observations were provided as part of the consultation and these will be recorded with responses from the working group and shared with all participants.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES**

- 4.1 Each Parish Council area is unique and operates autonomously. As part of the Parish Support Programme each area is encouraged to have a local plan to highlight needs and priorities. Certain themes however inevitably emerge across the rural communities that are common for all and it is these common themes that are the focus of the Rural Vision.

- 4.2 The Parish Charter is designed to support parishes in retaining their distinctiveness while providing a working partnership arrangement that enables opportunities to be embraced. It will also highlight that community networks need to be proactively supported to enable them to be as effective as possible and ensure this is more widely recognised and adopted as an integral approach in the development and delivery of the council's services.

## **5. IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Rural Vision and Parish Charter 2015 have been developed with the full participation of the Parish Councils in Peterborough.
- 5.2 The Rural Parish Council's local strategies, Neighbourhood Plans and/or Forward Plans will be taken into consideration in the implementation of the Rural Vision to ensure effective and joined up delivery of the agreed priorities.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 A 12 week public consultation period concluded on 31 July 2015. In total 26 responses were received covering 19 out of possible 26 parished areas of the city.
- 6.2 All comments and views received in response to the consultation have been recorded and are included at appendix 1. Where appropriate, editorial changes have been made within the final draft documents. The Parish Working Group will develop responses to each of the comments received, which will in turn be shared with all Parish Councils.

## **7. EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

- 7.1 That the Commission approves the final drafts and the Parish Liaison Working Group oversees the delivery of the action plan, raising matters with the Commission as required.
- 7.2 That the documents are adopted by Cabinet and used to inform policies and plans as well best practice to meet customer experience standards.

## **8. NEXT STEPS**

- 8.1 The final documents, if approved by the Commission, will be presented to Cabinet for adoption.
- 8.2 The Parish Liaison Working Group will continue to convene on a monthly basis to oversee the delivery of the action plan with updates provided to the Commission as required.

## **9. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- 9.1 Rural Vision and Strategy (*Part of Peterborough's Community Strategy 2007*)

## **10. APPENDICES**

- 10.1 Appendix 1: Consultation Responses  
Appendix 2: Final Draft 2015 Rural Vision & Charter.

## APPENDIX 1 – CONSULTATION RESPONSES

1	<p>Overall I agree with the objectives because rural parish councils with their local knowledge are in a good position to complement the work of the PCC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• page 1 Note accompanying the map. It states that the rural area accounts for 77% of the area and 12% of the population, but fails to quantify its contribution to the council tax receipts.</li> <li>• page 3 Delivering the shared vision. First bullet point What is meant by "self-sufficient" rural communities? The rural and urban areas today are closely linked for housing, employment, retail provision, medical services, leisure pursuits and so on. The villages hope to remain as separate entities and not to be gobbled up by urban sprawl. Is that what it means?</li> <li>• page 4 a. "transport networks" and "public transport" are non-existent in many rural areas. What is "public realm"?</li> <li>• "farm diversification and productivity" and "support for village shops and pubs" are not in the remit of parish councils or the City Council so why are they included in the action plan?</li> <li>• page 6 first box and page 7 3.1 What is the evidence that villages want to "devolve certain services"?</li> <li>• 2.4 I do not remember being consulted about the imposition of a charge for emptying the brown bins. This is an additional tax on rural dwellers.</li> <li>• page 7 2.17 "Arrangements" for parish councils to respond "in a timely way". Most parish councils meet once a month. There should be a requirement for planning officers to allow extra time for parish council comments if the deadline falls between meetings. At present some officers will but some won't.</li> <li>• page 8 4.5 It is unreasonable to request parish councils to forecast budgets "for a minimum of 3 years" when there are so many unanswered questions, notably precept, increases in costs, for example CALC membership in 2015 was 73% higher than in 2014.</li> </ul>
2	<p>My query to you relates to a sentences on page 3 ' Delivering the Shared Vision' which reads,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build capacity and resilience to be self sufficient rural communities</li> <li>• Address and challenge infrastructure improvements that ensure rural communities are able to maximise equal liveability opportunities</li> <li>• Could you help me to understand what is meant by 'capacity and resilience' in this context.</li> <li>• What is a 'self sufficient rural community' and why should it be desirable?</li> <li>• What do you mean by 'address and challenge infrastructure improvements'. We have an ongoing problem with drains in XXX. Would this strategy resolve the problem?</li> <li>• What do you mean by 'equal liveability opportunities'? Equal to what? I couldn't find 'liveability' in my Concise Oxford Dictionary.</li> </ul> <p>It is important that we understand what the vision and strategy means if it is to have any significance particularly if it is at variance with what we are trying to achieve with our neighbourhood plan.</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A very good piece of work, well done. Reading this morning a Facebook comment regarding the use of plain English however, is worth noting. As we've previously discussed and agreed I would like, for the finished strategy, all 'PCC-speak' converted into the language folk use please?</li> <li>• "....Build capacity and resilience to be self sufficient rural communities.....address and challenge infrastructure improvements that ensure rural communities are able to maximize equal liveability opportunities...."</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I know what you mean but others might not.</li> </ul>
4	<p>Rural Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rural vision will be a useful tool in allowing the diverse parish councils across the PCC unitary area find common ground and to work together in matters of, for instance devolved services, forming clusters to gain economies of scale.</li> </ul> <p>Parish Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• XXX Council views the charter as a very positive document, formalising the expectations of the working relationship between the unitary and parish councils and making clear what is expected of members of parish councils in helping the rural vision come to fruition.</li> <li>• The document does not make clear how PCC officers and in particular outsourced partner employees will be kept advised of the necessary working with parish councils.</li> <li>• Training (ongoing) in how to engage with, outsource and manage devolved services will be critical</li> </ul>
5	<p>A joint vision is welcome but it must fully acknowledge the desire of parishes to maintain their integrity and rural character. The main factors are covered but we would prefer greater emphasis on quality of life and less on growth.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The emphasis is very much on devolution of services, with no concrete offer of support to parish councils in exchange. To what extent is the devolution of duties to be imposed on parish councils?</li> <li>• The Background acknowledges that rural parishes have “strong independent local identities and sense of heritage and belonging, choosing to retain their rural way of life”, so it is comforting that future policies will be “rural proofed” (p. 2, line 11). However, the Parish Charter is set within the framework of PCC’s Sustainable Community Strategy, which aims to deliver a “bigger and better Peterborough”. We accept the need for more housing and realise that limited growth in rural areas is inevitable, but we feel that the term “sustainable” is not explained adequately. What may seem sustainable to PCC may not appear that way to a rural parish.</li> </ul> <p>The Shared Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We endorse the aim (p. 3, point 5) of improving joint working between PCC and parish councils, to enable services to be delivered more efficiently and appropriately.</li> <li>• The list of themed headings (p. 4) has much in common with XXX’s Parish Plan. However, because maintenance of rural character and culture and heritage have been incorporated in Economics (p. 4, f), we feel that they have been downgraded. In our opinion, they are not mere economic assets, rather they have an intrinsic value that underlies all six themes (a - f). We suggest that Maintenance of rural character, local culture and heritage should be given prominence as an over-arching principle linking the six themes, and that it should be shown as such in the accompanying diagram.</li> <li>• We would like greater clarity about the extent of data gathering that parish councils will be expected to undertake, in order to monitor success (p. 3, point 3).</li> <li>• We find the phrase “maximise equal liveability opportunities” (p. 3, last line) difficult to understand.</li> </ul> <p>Parish Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We very much welcome the acknowledgement that parishes need to retain distinctiveness (p. 6, line 5) but we are unsure what is meant by building “community resilience”.</li> <li>• Point 2.8 (p. 7) states that Peterborough City Council will “Seek comments from parish councils before making decisions .....”. We think this should be reworded to say “Seek and take into consideration comments from parish councils before making decisions .....”.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Point 2.15 (p. 7) says that all parish councils will be treated equally “on merit”. This is a value judgement. Is our performance to be judged by PCC and what are the criteria?</li> <li>• The section on Devolved Services and Assets (p. 7) is very open-ended. It is clear that PCC is to devolve services to parish councils, but we are given no idea of the extent of this, nor of what would happen if parish councils do not wish to take on the responsibility. Would services be reduced or even removed? How much extra work would parish councils be capable of absorbing? We feel that full account should be taken of the fact that parish councils have limited capacity for fund-raising and for finding the time and expertise for contract management.</li> <li>• There is no firm promise of financial support in return for devolution of services, only mention of “formal agreements” (p. 7, point 3.4). We feel there should be an undertaking to make “adequate financial arrangements”. Under Finances (p. 8) there is an admission that there are no additional funds for implementing the Charter and that even continuing to cover the costs associated with elections and referenda will depend on a mandate from national legislation (p. 8, point 4.3). We appreciate the financial pressure on the City Council, but we feel that the burden cannot be unfairly passed to parish councils.</li> <li>• The requirement to budget for a minimum of three years (p. 8, point 4.5) means that parish councils need to be notified of the amount of the precept three years in advance.</li> </ul>
6	<p>Supportive of the document and feel that this would be an improvement from where things are at present. If everything that is included is achieved XXX would be very happy. The concern is that it is not achievable and what resources are going to be made available to support Parish Councils. It would be useful to understand what the effect this will have on local Parish Councils. This is of concern to XXX, as they do not have the resources to take on additional responsibilities on their own. We would want to join with larger Parish Councils to do this.</p>
7	<p>Pleased that recognition given to reflect the valuable role Parish Councils play and the agreement is also a demonstration of PCC's strong commitment to improve joint working relations.</p> <p>Parish Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree that all policies, procedures and strategies that form part of the overall community strategy will have a direct or indirect relevance for rural issues. This vision and supporting Parish Charter will direct that all existing and emerging policies, procedures and strategies are ‘rural proofed’ to ensure the implications for rural communities are an integral consideration in their development and delivery.</li> <li>• Agree with shared vision objectives</li> <li>• Common strategic priorities plan under themed headings do NOT include Rural Policing. This is a priority for rural communities as they feel vulnerable and MUST be included.</li> </ul> <p>Partnership Working for Communications and Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advise each other in advance of key personnel changes (e.g. Council Clerk or the Head of Planning Services). This should also include Peterborough City Council section heads and their responsibilities as since outsourcing has taken place, Parishes do not know who to contact with an enquiry. Agree with items 2.8 through to 2.21</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have some reservations about the ‘Action Plan’ unless it is managed and its performance monitored effectively to ensure genuine actions are delivered with real and measurable benefits within a realistic timescale. Strategy, aims and vision are all necessary and laudable steps on the way but they don’t of themselves get things done.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However, anything that will ensure services are delivered more efficiently and meet the needs of rural communities has to be a good thing. Similarly, an improvement in joint working between the city council and parish councils is obviously desirable and in principle the proposed Rural Vision and Parish Charter could enable this, if properly implemented by all parties. So I would be supportive of this initiative, in principle.</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At Parish Council meeting on 13th July 2015 XXX Parish Council were in agreement that this was a valuable and well thought out document</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most of the individual matters listed for the parties to act upon cannot be disputed as beneficial aspirations for all concerned.</li> <li>• However, the parish council is unconvinced that actions will follow on from words. In the last six months, since the city council budget proposals for 2015/16 were published, our parish council has made a number of enquiries about the devolution of services, or contributions to city council provided services, as we may be interested in trying to maintain existing standards in our area. We have not received any responses from PCC with the information needed in order for us to decide whether to take further action upon these matters. This is not a good portent for the fulfilment of those objectives listed in the charter.</li> <li>• A charter is fine and we have no objection to its adoption; but to realise the stated objectives will need a lot more education – particularly for parish councillors. Bullet points 2.13 and 2.19 should be at the top of the lists and be pushed hard to ensure that parish councils/councillors are better informed and knowledgeable about what can be achieved.</li> </ul>
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• XXX broadly support the ethos and sentiment behind the proposed rural/parish charter. Increased democracy and greater access to training and decision making is something which we should strive for. We do have reservations about the movement towards devolution of services. This would appear to be a precursor to huge cuts in parish precepts unless we take on additional services from the local government.</li> <li>• The vagueness of the proposal as it stands is our greatest concern. There are no examples, best practice or outlines as to how this would work.</li> <li>• As a consequence it appears that this is a thinly veiled attempt to pass huge swathes of services to parish councils. We cannot agree to this proposal as we are not equipped financially or with the time to look after all the services in our local community. That is not because we do not want to, but our councillors are volunteers and work full time.</li> <li>• Under the current proposals we could possibly be responsible for all maintenance work, highways, mental and physical health services not to mention other services such as transport. Whereas full council has a full time support network to deal with such issues, local volunteers do not. We are aware that the current plans are to encourage parish councils to apply for additional powers. Yet there is no assurance that this process will be forced upon parish councils to receive a sustainable precept.</li> <li>• If the proposal was to offer support to parish councils to seek partnerships with other parishes to improve broadband connectivity, or to roll out a project to improve the community, then we may look differently upon this. Having powers to create new services is very different from taking on existing services.</li> <li>• Until further work is done on this charter we will view its current status as an euphemism for further cuts and we will not support it unless further work is done to set out the parameters of what will be devolved.</li> </ul>
12	<p>Rural Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are not a rural Parish Council and therefore have no comments.</li> </ul> <p>Parish Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We accept the comments made in paragraphs 2.1-2.7 and endorse the sentiment</li> </ul>

	<p>expressed therein, but add "and seek to consult in advance" to 2.4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We are in favour of the comments in paragraphs 2.8-2.16 although we would add that this is not happening at present. We, from experience, have doubts that this will actually work in practice. In response to consultations, there should be reasoned answers, sufficient background material and policy changes should be openly explained.</li> <li>• We endorse paragraphs 2.17-2.21.</li> <li>• In so far as paragraphs 3.1-3.4 are concerned we can only repeat that this is not happening at present We would like clarification that if we take on services then we will not have any funding received from Peterborough City Council stopped within a few years and then be expected to fund the services altogether. There needs to be some understanding of how long term the proposal is, and reasonable notice given of services being devolved.</li> <li>• We can agree paragraphs 3.5-3.6.</li> <li>• If paragraphs 4.1-4.3 are adhered to then we accept what is said.</li> <li>• We accept what is said in paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 but we must have all the information in good time to decide if we can liaise with residents and set the precept. We cannot have what happened this year when we were asked in January to help with a project but we had to decline because we set the precept for 2015-2016 in November 2014. We can only prepare a 3 year plan if we have all the information from Peterborough City Council for the same period. for example we have been advised that play equipment is coming to the end of its natural life and when that happens Peterborough City council will not be renewing the equipment. Despite asking for more information this had not been forthcoming. Plans can only reflect what is known about.</li> <li>• We agree with 5.1.</li> </ul>
13	<p>Rural Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the boundary review some of the numbers and the maps are out of date, otherwise excellent.</li> </ul> <p>Parish Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent document</li> </ul>
14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "A strong rural voice is vital"</li> <li>• to address all these issues it is vital XXX has strong representation of a dedicated City Councillor in what will be an area covering over half the rural area, one size does not fit all.</li> </ul> <p>Parish Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Parish Charter relies heavily on PCC fulfilling their obligations. Does the Charter provide means for the City Council to be held to account if necessary?</li> <li>• With financial economies and rising level of crime does policing figure in the Charter?</li> </ul>
15	<p>Parish Charter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I have no problem with the Parish Charter. That strikes as being relevant and practical. (My only reservation is that as a small parish council giving 3 year budget forecasts (para 4.5) becomes difficult due to the effect of unexpected expenditure demands).</li> </ul> <p>Rural Vision</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I am very uneasy about the Rural Vision though. The words on page 3, The Shared Vision, are ok, but the massive annual action plan is inappropriate in my view. It's incredibly wide-ranging themes surely should apply to the entire local authority area, not just 'the rurals'. Either it should be amended in this way or, better, it is trimmed and focussed to apply to the rural areas only and to those service areas over which the Parish Councils are likely to have a role in service delivery.</li> </ul>

16	<p>Appointed Cabinet Member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is noted this member should champion rural issues - but urban issues also come before parishes, would it not be advantageous to have a member of the planning/environment committee also as a champion?</li> </ul> <p>Parish Liaison Forum</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More emphasis should be placed on these meetings - perhaps a consultation to co-ordinate and obtain convenient times for meetings - suiting maximum members.</li> </ul> <p>Housing Associations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As Peterborough has No council houses - more involvement/co-operation should be encouraged.</li> </ul>
17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pleased that PCC wishes to strengthen and maintain the relationship with Parish Councils (P6) - Positive statement, but the PCC usually have objections overruled!</li> <li>• Also, P6 items 2.1 and 2.2 would be extremely helpful as often information from PC to PCC is not passed on to new personnel.</li> <li>• Page 7 items 2.8, 2.9, 2.14, 2.19, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.5 would be positive moves.</li> <li>• Am doubtful that precept/funding would be available to fund improved links.</li> </ul>
18	<p>Positives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• overall XXX support the idea of PCC working more closely with PCs for a more effective delivery of services.</li> <li>• agree that supporting PCs in maintaining our particular characteristics and strong local identities, and unique heritage is vital, especially with any future development.</li> <li>• they agree that the Parish Liaison Group is a good means to exchange information and share ideas.</li> <li>• they agree with the common priorities, the requirements of the partnership working agreement, and the presence of 4 PC reps on PCC scrutiny group.</li> </ul> <p>Concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is concern over the extra funds that may be needed for implementation.</li> <li>• the ideal of self sufficient local communities is good, however PC sizes vary and we have very limited funding - will extra funding be needed/available?</li> <li>• Due to the number of aims and objectives, they would want to see a detailed action plan on a yearly basis, and how it will be monitored to ensure efficiency?</li> <li>• the process allows for services to be devolved, however, should there be a process for the reverse???</li> <li>• there is some concern that increased use of volunteers may be required to provide services if budgets are cut once they are devolved...</li> <li>• Who is the Cabinet Minister nominated to champion rural causes, please?!</li> </ul>
19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We feel that if fully implemented the Vision &amp; Charter will help with the development of rural communities and the countryside.</li> <li>• We do not believe that there are any specific factors that have been left out.</li> <li>• We think that the Charter will help Parishes to work more effectively with the PCC. One area that we remain concerned about is the precept information that will be required in the future. We do however accept that this is a matter that can be addressed at the Parish Liaison Forum.</li> </ul>
20	<p>I am pleased to support the draft document as presented. Items 2.8 and 2.12 of the partnership working will be much appreciated in the Parish.</p>

21	This is a positive document which seeks to promote effective communications between rural communities and Peterborough City Council. If implemented effectively it could have positive results.
22	In principle I think it is a good document and look forward to its implementation, but trust it will not increase bureaucracy.
23	...a well thought out plan and will get our Parish Council to sort out budgets well in advance. We should be able to rely on PCC to meet their obligations now we have a structured form.
24	The parish charter is an excellent idea and lists the areas which councils should certainly act upon and contribute to – but will they? In most cases I doubt it, at least not without pressure being put on them to take more interest in their communities and act in a more efficient manner. Bullet point 2.19 should be at the top of the list. The Sustainable Community Strategy is a nonsense. Substantial growth is not sustainable and destroys our environment; the words are contradictory. I support the majority of the proposals and objectives contained within the charter.
25	Cllrs generally welcomed this document and felt that the charter was designed to allow parish councils to take the initiative in seeking to improve services & facilities by working with the city council. There was some concern that the wording of the document left open the possibility that it may be used to foist services on parishes against their wishes and without adequate funding. The clerk was asked to convey positive feedback to the authors of the report but suggesting inclusion of a veto by the Parish Council.
26	<Comments on wording (plain English) received from one further respondent.>

This page is intentionally left blank